

Lamp Vacation

By: EL_Refresho

Anna jogged through the park under overcast skies and enjoyed the crisp winter air around her. She bundled up in a fleece jacket and gloves while keeping her brown hair back in a ponytail. Her cheeks and nose flushed red from the cold, but it took weather worse than this to keep her off the jogging trails.

The school year had ended and she had packed already. Tomorrow, Anna would drive to her parent's house so she could enjoy six weeks of no school in the wooded hills. That was her plan, until she passed a bench on the trail and saw a strange copper lamp sitting at its side.

Anna thought of it as an Aladdin lamp, but she could fit this one in the palm of her hand. And even though clouds hung over the world today, the lamp cast a light of its own, drawing Anna's vision toward it. She slowed and stopped her jog, curiosity being a natural state for her, and walked to the bench to look at the strange, tiny lamp.

"Oh, why not?" She asked herself and bent down to take the small thing. It would, at least, be a nice dorm decoration. But the lamp rattled and shook before she even touched the metal object. Anna jumped back, suddenly wondering if she had activated a bomb. Then, glittering pink smoke burst from the nozzle. It raced around her and Anna spun to keep it in sight. She watched in disbelief as it formed a miniature pink tornado right on the jogging trail. And then it formed into a man.

He stood taller than Anna, but of medium build. His thin clothes of a pink vest and pantaloons revealed tan skin. He had lush, dark hair and inviting brown eyes. His slippers curled at the toes. He turned to Anna and smiled in a way that made her heart pick up a little.

"Oh, do you have bad timing," he said.

Anna blinked. "What, why?" Then she thought for a moment, "And, wait, are you an actual Genie?"

He laughed, "I am, but I'm on vacation as of five seconds ago."

"Vacation? Genies get vacation?"

"We do indeed. One day for every century we spend in the lamp. I have twenty five days saved up."

She did some math in her head, "You've been a Genie for 2500 years?!"

"Indeed I have. I lived in the old Persian Empire."

"Well, ok. That's cool. But, do I get any wishes?"

"Unfortunately not. And, unlike the movies you mortals make, we only grant a single wish. But since you never freed me from my lamp, I cannot grant your desires."

"What if I wait? Can I hold onto your lamp, wait until your vacation is over, then release you for my wish?"

"A clever idea, but no. My lamp, being unoccupied, will go into hiding on its own shortly. Not even I will know where it goes. And when my vacation is through, I will return to it on my own." He brought his hand up to his chin and thought for a moment, "But there is a deal we can make. A deal where you can get more than one wish, in fact."

Anna's ears perked up, "What is it? I'll do it. Because I have a lot to wish for."

The genie held up his hand and forestalled Anna. "Wait until you hear what my offer is. For the duration of my vacation, twenty five days and nights, you will replace me in my lamp. You will serve whomever

takes possession of you, and grant to them whatever wish they desire. At the end of twenty-five days and my return, I shall grant to you one wish for each that you granted, plus one."

Anna had to think, and she looked back at the little lamp. She thought about everything she knew and everything he had told her. This might be a trick, but if it was, the genie also showed her a way out of it.

Besides, she wondered, how bad could being a Genie really be?

"I'll do it. Twenty five days in the lamp."

The genie looked surprised, but he recovered quickly and said, "Hold out your hands."

Anna did, and they touched wrist-to-wrist. The Genie wore copper shackles the same color and metal as his lamp. The metal came to life as they touched, moving and melting like liquid, spreading out across Anna's own wrists. She stared at the shackles and saw the deal she had made written across them. She had just enough time to look at the Genie before her body burst into glittery pink smoke and yanked her into the lamp.

And so Anna began her Christmas vacation.

Anna the Genie knew a few things about life in the lamp. It sealed her perfectly inside such that no sight or sound from the outside reached her. The vessel held her captive inside its copper walls, and even time had no meaning. Each blink of an eye could represent a second or a thousand years. Hopefully not the latter, but she had no way of knowing.

She had a sense for her containment. To Anna, she appeared to be a normal girl wearing pink Genie attire. She paced inside the lamp, her slippered feet walking over soft rugs. She had enough room to pace -- but just barely. She had enough room to lie down -- but just barely. She had enough room to stand -- but just barely. No matter what she did, Anna felt the caress of maroon veils, and just beyond them, the oppressive bronze walls that trapped her. Anna wondered if she lived as a cloud of pink smoke, or if she did have a body that could pace around the lamp.

Anna made another lap, turned, and raised into the air, letting her feet point down. She bowed with her hands pressed together across her chest. "Greetings, mortal," Anna said, her voice powerful and formal, "I am the Genie of the Lamp and I shall grant to you one wish." She shook her head. She didn't sound right, or herself. Anna saw no reason to change just because she lived in a lamp.

Despite her confinement, Anna had not once doubted her decision to be a temporary Genie. Bronze walls and strange spells enslaved, trapped, and imprisoned her -- and none of that bothered her because she felt the stirrings of something powerful when she flexed her fingers. Magic wove into her body, from the crown of her head to the tips of her toes. The more she delved into it, the more she wondered where she ended and the magic began. She desperately wanted to know what it felt like to use that magic, to take the raw, unrefined threads of power and weave them into her Master's or Mistress's desire.

Anna spun around and offered her hand to the empty air, "Hi!" She said merrily to no one, "I'm Anna, and I'll be your Genie..." she broke off then, thinking she sounded like a ditzy store clerk.

It didn't matter to Anna, somehow, that the lamp would force her to have Masters and Mistresses, but that could be born from ignorance. She did know what it meant to serve Master, and so imagined it to be a fun experience, or at least interesting. Anna would be honored to serve others, so she thought, and to give to them what they so desired. That feeling could be a trick by the lamp to keep her pacified, but Anna didn't really care. She thought longingly of the Masters and Mistress to come.

Something fell into place in her mind, and Anna knew just what to say. Just what to do.

The lamp shook at that moment. Anna the Genie braced herself against the cool metal walls imprisoning her. She had been an adrenaline junky outside the lamp. She had raced in marathons, she binged horror movies, and she loved roller coasters. But Anna's heart had never raced like it raced now.

The lamp shook again and Anna looked to the lamp's spout that now seemed so much closer than it ever had. A thought, or a force, or a command overtook her mind.

"Genie of the lamp, I command you appear to me."

A Master summoned Anna forth and his command sent shudders through her body. She heard the voice like she might hear the voice of God. A surge of anxiety and excitement ran through Anna. She looked up to the lid of the lamp, wondering who called her. Who had taken control of the lamp -- and of her. That Master would use Anna, and make her grant a wish. Tingling, tickling energy washed through her body and when the lamp quaked a third time, Anna became smoke in the blink of an eye, racing toward the spout of the lamp. Racing to her first Master.

Anna had never experienced a rush like the first time she left the lamp. Her Master's command to leave set off a complicated dance of pink light and chaotic energy. Her body reformed for her, facing Anna to her Master. That word flashed through her mind as she saw the man in front of her. He was young and wore poorly fitting clothes and kept his hair fashionably unfashioned. Anna the Human might have asked his name, and how his day had gone. But Anna wasn't human right now. She was a Genie. And her Master held the lamp.

She smiled at him, and he had a moment of quiet laughter to himself. The Genie bowed. "I'm Anna, and I'm your Genie. What do you wish of me?"

The Genie truly wanted to know, and the thought of granting his wish excited far more than it terrified. She wanted to test the limits of her newfound powers. She wanted to help people. Anna felt real gratitude for this Master who spared her from the overbearing confinement of the lamp. Her Master smiled possessively as he crossed his arms across his chest. He looked Anna over, and something in it caused her own smile to falter.

"How many wishes will you grant me, slave?"

The question came at Anna and caught her off guard. Not just the question itself, but the way her Master had said it. Had she done something wrong, the Genie thought. "Just one wish, Master, and then the lamp will reclaim me."

Her Master made a harsh buzzing noise, "Ehhh. Wrong. I know the trick to get you to grant unlimited wishes." He smirked, "You're going to be mine for a long, long time, slave."

Anna couldn't keep the surprise from her face as she blinked. Could that be true, could she be made to grant more than one wish? What did that mean for her vacation? He may be right, and may have the power to make her a Genie for a long time...Anna didn't want to think about that.

"Firstly, Master, could you please not call me a slave? Genie is fine, but I'd prefer Anna." She didn't judge her Master for his language, though she disliked it. She had no place to judge a mortal. Maybe he just had a very bad day. "Secondly, I'm sorry, Master. I didn't know that, since I'm still new at being a Genie."

"Suuuure you are. Just like you're just some mortal who got captured by a lamp unjustly. Well, guess what, slave, whoever's dumb enough to get sucked into a Genie lamp deserves to be a slave."

"Master, I..." She started to explain the situation. To Anna, Genie and Slave were separate things, and she was a Genie. Besides that, she entered the lamp on her own. But her Master interrupted her thoughts.

"Be quiet and bow to me."

The command struck Anna like a sledgehammer. The desire to bow to her Master overwhelmed her mind. She fell to the floor in quiet supplication, staring down at the unvacuumed brown carpet of his house. Her Master said nothing for several beats. And she realized then her Master wasn't having a bad day at all. He was just a jerk. "You may rise." He said, indifferently. He left Anna the choice, but she knew that he wanted her to stand up. And she did, too.

"It's time for my wish now, I think. It's a wish that has many parts. Slave, for the first part of my wish, I wish to live in a mansion of my own free of charge."

Anna's Master crossed his arms and waited for her to work magic for him. Being told a wish obliterated all thought in the Genie's mind but what her Master desired. She didn't even see him, and she didn't even feel

like she stood in his home anymore. She existed everywhere and nowhere. In the lamp and out of it. Bound and free.

"I wish to live in a mansion of my own free of charge."

She first thought to make her Master part of a live-in staff for some well-to-do family. But it would be a petty, small revenge. And wherever he went, so did the lamp. So that would not fly. Besides, his next wish would correct that mistake. So, reluctantly, Anna began to search for bigger and bigger houses to give her Master.

And then she thought...What about something smaller? Much smaller. A mansion, but one not for humans. She couldn't take away her Master's mind or his will. She could not harm him in any way. He may be the Wicked Master of the West, but she could not drop a house on him. The laws of the lamp forbade Anna doing any of that. But, she realized, strangely, that transforming her Master into a doll did him no harm. It merely made his body small and stuffed.

Anna smiled. He would live in a mansion of his own and free of charge. Anna pressed her hands together and told her Master the truth:

"Your wish is my command."

Pink smoke and light suddenly rose around him. And then, he vanished, sent away to a toy store across town. Sent to a huge dollhouse on display. Shrunken and transformed into a little ragdoll, fated to spend the rest of his days thinking about treating Genie's nicer.

Anna smirked and wiped her hands, congratulating herself on a job well done when pink smoke and light returned to reclaim her for the lamp.

"Oh, come on, you can't..." Her body dissolved from the world. It reappeared inside the small lamp and its oppressive walls. "...give me a minute?" She asked her captor. It replied with stern, almost disapproving, silence. Anna sighed.

"Lesson learned. Don't immediately get rid of my Master."

Anna poured from the lamp as a cloud of smoke that spiraled around her Master's room, curling and twisting until she found a spot to reform. The Genie could not say how long she had spent inside the lamp, only that when she opened her eyes she saw a room filled with half-wrapped boxes and her Master standing jaw dropped and wide eyed in front of her.

"Hell, Mistress," Anna said with a deep bow. "I'm Anna, and I'm your Genie. What do you wish of me?"

She caught only a glimpse of the woman who had released her from the lamp, but it didn't matter to Anna who her Mistress was, what her name was, or even what she would wish for: the Mistress had released Anna from the lamp, and so Anna must serve her. But as the Genie began to stand again, she heard her Mistress's voice, and everything changed.

"Anna?!" Mistress shouted, and it made her Genie jump back, eyes going wide. Anna knew that voice. She knew her Mistress from before the lamp. Despite this, the Lamp bound Anna to only think of her as Mistress, not even allowing Anna to think her Mistress's name, even if they had taken history together last semester.

Anna noticed a lamp sized box beside her Mistress, and she realized the lamp would make a great Christmas gift. She had to put this idea away, though, as her excited, energetic blonde Mistress before Anna needed her attention.

"How did you get in there?" She asked.

"I told you, Mistress, I'm a Genie. And since you released me, I'm your Genie to grant you one wish, whatever you so desire." Anna said, while she wrapped her hands around her midriff, suddenly feeling exposed. She never thought she would serve someone she knew from real life. They had worked on a paper together, with Anna doing a bit more than all the work. Though she had liked Mistress in school otherwise.

"Why would a Genie be going to a human school?" Mistress asked, scrunching up her nose.

"I...became a Genie after the semester ended, Mistress." Anna had asked to become a Genie, so she couldn't say the lamp captured her. And she would be free just after Christmas, so she couldn't say the lamp trapped her. And Christmas Day seemed soon, at least, based on the lights, the tree, and the decorations. Soon, she would be free.

Anna's Mistress thought for a moment, "Hey, since I bought your lamp, does that mean I own you?"

"You are my Mistress, Mistress. I am bound to do whatever you say." Anna said. She didn't like the word ownership, even though she couldn't easily replace it with another word. She came with the lamp, and Mistress owned the lamp.

"Wow, that's cool!" Mistress looked around the room and then at the half-wrapped presents, "Genie, can you wrap the rest of these presents for me?"

She phrased it like a question, but it struck Anna like a compulsion, the lamp and her geniedom forcing her to obey, and she quickly sat down cross legged next to the nearest present, a toy bulldozer, and began to wrap it. Mistress watched, slightly confused.

"No magic?" She asked.

Anna shook her head, "I'm only allowed to use magic when I grant my Master's wish." Yet, somehow, she had perfect knowledge of how best to wrap presents, and quickly figured out how to wrap up every oddly shaped box. The command had cooled some and no longer overrode her thoughts, though Anna knew the command would not allow her to stop working.

To the Genie's surprise, Mistress sat down next to Anna. She helpfully handed over presents, tape, and whatever else sat out of Anna's reach as she needed them. But mostly, Mistress just asked questions.

"Anna, how did you become a Genie?"

The Genie told her story, about jogging, about seeing the lamp, and meeting the prior Genie. About his vacation, and the way they bargained.

"Was he hot?"

Anna didn't have to answer, but her small, coy smile said it all. "Very. And he looked great in pink." Anna's vacation would only last a few more days, but Mistress didn't pick up on, or care, about that.

Mistress laughed. "That's cool. I sort of want to wish for a hot guy to fall in love with me and take care of me. But then, I worry if he would be a jerk, or be like stalkery, or something."

"You're worried I might twist your wish somehow?"

"Would you do that?"

Anna honestly thought about it. "I want to grant my Master's wishes, Mistress. I think it's really cool that I can grant someone what they want most." The Genie said, and she wondered if that's what the lamp wanted her to say, or it nudged her to feel.

"Aww, you're such a good Genie, Anna." Mistress said, handing over a clothes box. "Have you thought about staying a Genie?"

The question startled Anna, almost dropping the ring box she held. The Genie shook her head, "Honestly, I haven't."

"You should think about it." Anna did, almost compelled to do so. The previous Genie had been in the lamp for over two thousand years, serving countless Masters and Mistresses. Could she do that, too? Would she be happy as a Genie? Anna frowned when she didn't answer with an immediate no, though neither did she answer with a yes.

"I'll think more about it, Mistress."

"Good," she said brightly and handed Anna the last box, a bobblehead of a sportsball player. "Oh, man, I don't have a present for my brother now. He's into all this new age magic stuff, so I thought your lamp would be cool. He's a dork, but I think you'd like him for a Master."

"Hmmm. Mistress, tell him his present didn't arrive in time, and you'll give it to him when it does."

"That's a great idea, Anna!"

The Genie wrapped the last present quickly and topped it with a gold bow. The compulsion fell away completely. "All done, Mistress."

"Thank you so much." Mistress said, though she didn't have to. I didn't have a choice but to obey, but the thought counted for a lot.

"Is there anything else you need, Mistress?"

She shook her head, sending waves through her messy blonde hair. "No. I need to get ready for the Christmas party. Genie, can you go back in your lamp for a bit?"

Anna nodded, "Of course, Mistress," she said without thinking, bursting back into smoke and swirling into her vessel. The Genie wondered just when her Mistress would make a wish. The vacation would be ending soon, and Anna didn't want to leave Mistress without granting a wish.

But her Mistress had given the Genie a lot to think about.

"Oh, Anna, could you come out of your lamp for me?" I heard my Mistress's summons, though I somehow knew she did not hold the lamp. Still, the laws that bound me forced me to go to her.

I swirled and reformed in front of her, wearing a proud and honest smile as I did. The journey from the lamp still felt like the best roller coaster I could ever imagine. I stood in my Mistress's living room, a space cramped by a too-large Christmas tree that glowed white light in the otherwise dim room.

My Mistress lounged on her couch nearby and slipped out her heels. She had just returned from her party and wore a sparkling green dress, black tights, and a silly elf hat with floppy cloth ears.

“Hi again, Mistress,” I said with a comfortable bow, “how was your party?”

“Great!” She said, and I smelled a little alcohol on her breath. She seemed lighter and looser than before.

“How was your lamp? I hope you didn’t mind going back inside.” She said.

I shook my head, “Fine, and you needn’t worry about me, Mistress.” I noticed then that my Mistress had set out a bottle of wine and two stem glasses on her coffee table near the lamp.

“Please don’t do that. Just because you’re a Genie doesn’t mean your feelings aren’t important. They are to me, and they should be to all your Masters. Speaking of, did you think about what I asked you?”

I nodded while picking up the wine bottle and poured one glass of amber liquid, which I handed to my Mistress. “I did,” I said

“*And?*” My Mistress said, while taking the glass from me. She sat up and watched me with eager eyes.

“I’d like to return to being human,” I said. My Mistress processed this, narrowing her eyes some, and leaning back in the couch. She held her wine with a light grasp and looked me over. I stood firm in my slippers and pantaloons under her gaze.

“Oh, really?”

“I can’t lie to you, Mistress.”

She took a sip from her wine and looked off, thinking. “I believe you,” she said at last. I relaxed my unknowingly tense shoulders.

“Sit down, Anna,” she said, her voice uncharacteristically firm. The compulsion to obey worked through me and made me walk to the couch, sitting on it as she had, curling my legs up. Turning inward to watch her.

“Of course, Mistress,” I said. I thought a small wall had been put up between us. My Mistress felt reserved. She still thought about what I had told her.

“What will you wish for, after you’re free?” My Mistress asked, a question so bold I rocked back some.

“I...don’t know,” I said. If the question surprised me, my answer stunned me. Before I went into the lamp, I had many wishes I wanted granted. Now, none seemed very important.

My Mistress smiled a little. “Your vacation ends in a few days, and then you get your wishes. And you haven’t thought about what you want?”

“Yes. But,” I said, refocusing myself, “this is embarrassing. I’m your Genie, and I should be asking what you want, Mistress.”

She rolled her eyes and hummed. “I would like my and my brother’s student loans paid off.”

I smiled, “That’s a good wish. Just say the magic word and I’ll be happy to grant it for you.”

My Mistress took a sip of her wine and I saw a twinkle in her eye. A twinkle more meaningful than just getting her wish. “Why?” she asked.

“I’m your Genie, Mistress. I am bound to grant your wish,” I said, not understanding why she asked why.

“But you don’t have to be happy about it, do you?”

My mouth fell open before my Genie instincts compelled me to answer. “No, Mistress, I do not.”

She leaned in to me, her smile becoming wider. “So why are you so happy to grant my wish?”

“Because then I’ll get another wish after my vacation,” I said, getting off the couch.

My Mistress groaned, “Ugh, we’ve been over this. You don’t care about those wishes. You don’t even know what to do with them.”

I bit my fingernails, and looked at the shackle on my wrist, then at the lamp, then at my harem costume.

“Mistress, just because...”

“Genie,” my Mistress said, putting her glass down, “for the next minute, you will forget about receiving extra wishes after your vacation. Now, do you still want to grant my wish?”

“Yes, because it’s a good wish and you’re a good Mistress who deserves it. That doesn’t mean I want to stay a Genie, and that I don’t want my freedom,” I said, anticipating my Mistress’s next maneuver. I failed.

“Then, I can just free you now. Better to have two or three extra days of freedom than to be stuck in a bottle, right? ‘Cause the other option is I give you to my brother, and you grant his wish. Maybe, if he’s quick enough, you can grant another wish for another Master after him.”

“I...” didn’t know what to say. I struggled to work up an answer to my Mistress. “I wouldn’t like that, because it would mean you used a wish for me. Your wish should be for something you want.”

“I want this kickass Genie named Anna to have what she wants. And if you can be all selfless and giving of yourself, why can’t I?” My Mistress said, standing up and walking to me.

“You can, of course. But...but maybe you should be a Genie.”

My Mistress shrugged, “Nah. I wanna be a kids book author when I grow up. I think I’ll write a book about a girl who gets turned into a Genie, and then finds out she likes it. Might take her a little bit to figure it out, though.”

“That’s not...that’s not what’s happening here,” I said.

“Anna, I think your heart,” she said, putting her hand on my chest, “knows what it wants. It’s time for your brain to figure it out, too.”

“Mistress, I...” fell silent, confused. I wanted my freedom. Of course I did, because I wanted what came after. A career. A family. Love. Vacations. I wanted out of the lamp. Right?

“Relax, Anna. I don’t think this is really your decision to make.” My Mistress said before turning around. She went back to pick up something from the couch, something she had hidden there. I saw a red box,

one of the ones I had wrapped for her early today. She handed it to me. “Merry Christmas, Anna. I thought I should get you a present.”

I took it gingerly and lifted the top, then pushed aside the layer of tissue paper. I gasped as I saw it: a crystal vase with a long, thin neck. Made only from glass, it had triangles and diamonds cut into the surface that did wonderful things with light.

“More living space in there than the lamp, right? My aunt has had this since she got married, but chipped it a few years ago,” Mistress pointed to a tiny notch in the top, barely visible unless you knew what to look for, “and she thought it was ruined. I bartered it back from her. Stole it, I guess. I want it to be your bottle.”

“I’d like...to be free.” I said, looking at my Mistress with pleading eyes. It was the truth. It had to be the truth. My heart pounded, but I could not put away the doubt in my mind. What if I really did want to be a Genie?

“Like I said, I don’t think that’s your decision to make anymore.” My Mistress took a deep breath. “Ok. Here goes.”

“Anna, I have a wish. It comes in three parts. For the first part of my wish, I wish that you paid my and my brother’s student loans in full.”

I set the bottle down and pressed my hands together, “Your wish is my command,” and my magic reached across the world at my Mistress’s command, depositing all the funds to the two accounts to wipe them out.

“For the second part of my wish, I wish that this bottle,” she pointed, “could properly hold a Genie.”

I nodded, “Your wish is my command.” I reached into the world of magic and discovered the intricate bindings that created Genie vessels, which I copied and laid into the bottle. The Christmas tree lights that played off its surface tinted pink.

I stared at the bottle, my soon to be vessel. I couldn't tell if happy tears or sad tears began to well in my eyes. My Mistress came to me and gave me a long hug before she made her wish.

"You're a great Genie. Remember that." She said. Then she whispered in my ear, "Anna, for the final part of my wish, I wish for you to become and remain the Genie of this bottle until a Master wishes you free."

"Your wish is my command," I whispered back. The bond between Veronica and I broke, and my body dissolved into glittering smoke and light even as she hugged me. My new bottle commanded me into its crystal form. Like an apple to the earth, I fell into it. Here I would stay, as cloud and dust, until a Master or Mistress called me out, so I would serve them.

My vacation in the lamp ended. My life in my bottle began.